Grantee Q&A: attracting visitors to Droitwich’s



Bookable and impromptu tours of the church's history and mosaics helped thousands of new visitors understand the heritage of this Catholic church in Droitwich, Worcestershire. Credit: Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria.

From carefully planning public engagement to administrative hitches, Jim Spink and Peter Vella share their insight into connecting people with a little-known piece of Worcestershire’s heritage.

About the project

Mosaics inspired by Italian churches in Ravenna completely cover the walls of the Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria in Droitwich.

Our grant of £190,000 helped restore them and digitise and safely store the 100-year-old life-size drawings (known as cartoons) that artist Gabriel Pippet used to design the mosaics between 1921–1932.

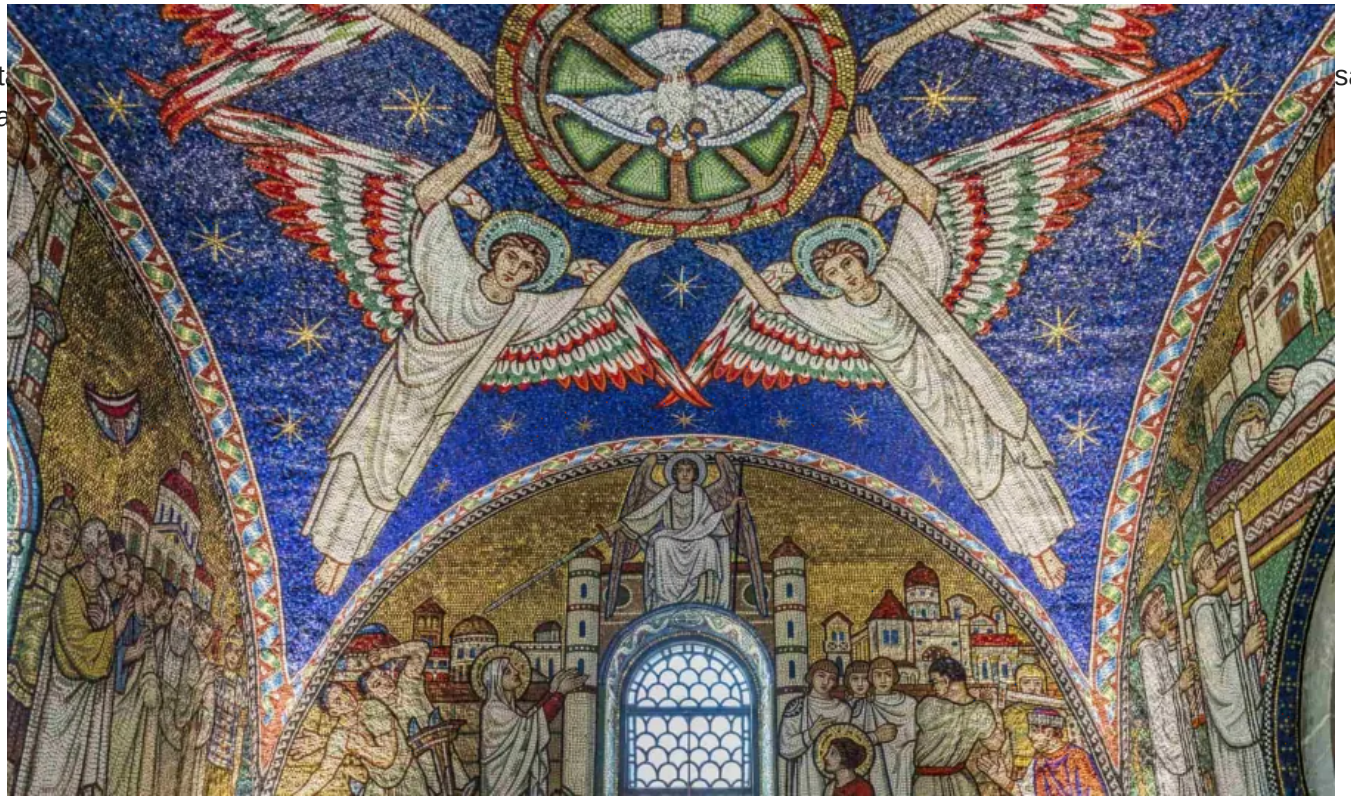
Free activities like children’s mosaic workshops, public tours and a pop-up café saw the church’s visitor numbers during the project more than double from 2,400 to 6,400 a year. Additional work to the side chapels revealed a rare marble mosaic floor that was previously unknown.

As a first-time applicant, what did you consider before you started on your application?

Peter: A contact from our archdiocese was able to advise and put us in touch with other people who had been through the process before. So, we understood what was involved in putting a project together before we embarked on it. What are the pros and cons? How's it going to work? Did we think we could meet the requirements that people we spoke to advised would be necessary?

What advice would you give to someone writing their first funding application?

Jim: It was important that we had a really good heritage story to tell and that we were passionate in our bid writing, we spent quite a lot of time developing the story.

Peter: saics were a

The mosaics, created in the 1920s, completely cover the church's walls and are thought to make the church unique. Credit: Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria.

What administrative things do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began the project?

Jim: Because of the structure of the Catholic Church, most churches will have to apply as part of their diocese. We ended up being able to apply as a parish because, unusually, our church is owned by a religious order, not the diocese.

Peter: But this caused hitches at the beginning for us, once we got started with the administration of how we received the money, who owned the heritage. Engage other legal parties to your church building early on.

What can other Roman Catholic churches learn from your approach to engaging the public with your artistic heritage?

Peter: Catholic churches are sacred spaces, we can't hold secular events in the church. That made our engagement much more intensive on volunteers – we had 42 who put a lot of hours in. At another local Church of England church we took advice from, it seemed they were able to deliver a programme with about five people, but they didn't have the constraints we have. Think carefully about what you can offer and whether you have the volunteer resources to do it.

Jim: The nearby parish hall was essential to the delivery of the community engagement programme – the workshops, café and a visitor centre. We were mindful that our activities could be disruptive to worshippers and we were conscious that the restoration project may not have unanimous support. But it turned out that it did!

Any advice when choosing a contractor for capital works?

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A mosaicist volunteered their time to deliver children's mosaic-making workshops, helping younger visitors be creative and connect to the church's heritage. Credit: Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria.

What’s been the most rewarding outcome of your project?

Peter: It has transformed the parish community and elevated their pride in their church – everyone now knows each other and has worked together for a common goal. And people in Droitwich know the church too. It was unknown before the project but has become a significant place in the town.

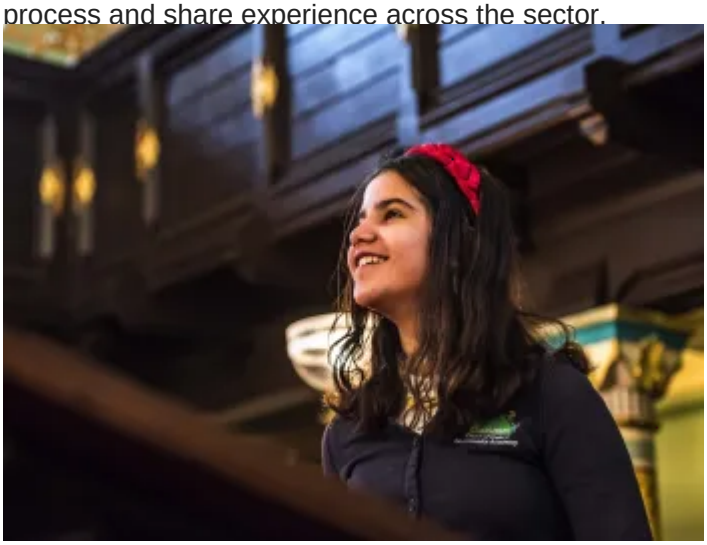
While delivering the project, what surprised you?

Jim: Personally, I found the relaxed culture in the heritage sector a massive surprise. Coming from a background in automotive manufacturing, I am only familiar with projects that are delivered on time, under budget and meet or exceed all objectives. I was surprised that it doesn’t really matter if you’re late on things, or if you need to end the project a few months early. Apparently it’s rare for things to go exactly as originally planned.

How will you continue the legacy of this project?

Jim: A ringfenced fund for ongoing mosaic restoration is established, and funds are flowing into it. All community engagement strands are continuing in some form beyond the official project’s end, with an army of volunteers to deliver them.

This is part of **a series of Q&As with successful grantees** – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.







ARK is bringing life back into the former synagogue. Credit: Nathan Jones.



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St John the Baptist Church, near Ludlow, is Grade II listed. Photo: ijenko ltd

Saving at-risk heritage at a rural Shropshire church